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ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether a self-concept enhancement program would effect significant change in the self-concepts of 4-year-old middle class preschoolers as compared with classmates not in the program. All participating children (N=52) were pre- and posttested using the Thomas Self-Concept Values Test and the Developmental Profile. The experimental group consisted of 34 children, who participated in 33 sessions (one 20- to 30-minute session per day) over an 11-week period. Activities focused on enhancement of the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social self. The control group consisted of 18 children. Results indicated the experimental group did show more significant changes in self-concept scores than the control group. Parallels were observed between significant self-concept scale changes in the experimental group and certain specific self-concept enhancement activities. Teachers' ratings and children's self-reports indicated very significant increases on the factor scales of happiness, sociability, sharing, less fear of things and people, independence, self-confidence, and sensitivity to others. The control group showed only a significant increase in self-awareness. This study has underscored the need for self-concept enhancement programs as a crucial aspect of preschool experience. (DP)

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Self-Concept Enhancement of Preschool Children

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For a number of years the term self-concept has been the focus of study in many areas of social science. Within the realm of human development, an emphasis on the foundations and enhancement of self-concept has become the attention of numerous educational programs. This study is concerned with the self-concept growth of preschool children in an experimental training program.

Background of the Problem

Murphy (Butler, 1970) emphasized that by age three a child has developed a well integrated view of himself, which is the core and precipitator of his future behavior. Yet a quieting note was offered by Butler when she remarked:

> Life is not over at age three, but the general view toward the world and toward oneself is already present. Possibilities for change are always present, but the longer a behavior persists the more difficult it is to change (p. 107)

The emergence of divergent styles of behavior has been traced to a crucial period of growth, which begins between ten months and eighteen months, according to researchers of the Harvard Pre-School Project. For six years they have studied "the development of adaptive abilities or competence in the first six years of life" (White, 1972), searching for causal environmental factors. Through their study they hoped to reveal how to structure a child's experiences during early years in order to maximize development of competence. The work of these

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researchers has contributed to a new realm of thought in preschool education, and has shown a crucial need for education to extend back to the most important formative period, the child's first year of life.

The impact of Murphy's (Butler, 1970) observations and the findings of the Harvard Pre-School Project should have particular relevance to the organized preschool programs which begin with three-year-old children. Although such evidence has illuminated the need for pre-school education and child care to focus directly on behavior and self-concept development, the response in terms of programs has been slow and scattered. Most programs with an emphasis on positive self-concept development have been of the compensatory education type designed for deprived children. Yet, there has been no conclusive evidence to show that negative self-concepts are an exclusive characteristic of the lower social classes. On the contrary, research has shown that it is a malady which strikes all children. In stressing the responsibility of society to concentrate on the crucial years of childhood, Gordon (1969) made a dramatic and thought-provoking parallel: "For very young children, negative self-view may be as damaging as physical illness or actual physical handicap" (p. 378).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a self-concept enhancement program on four-year-olds who attended nursery school. The investigators sought to answer: Will the utilization of a self-concept enhancement program effect a significant change in the self-concepts of four-year-old preschool children as compared with

four-year-old preschool children not receiving the program.

Although the study of change in the personal-psychological-social area generally has been considered to be one of the most important considerations of early childhood education (Thomas, 1969), there exists a paucity of research in this crucial area. The studies of self-concept change in preschool children have been few in number, and generally they have been confined to culturally deprived populations (Manch, 1969; Sprigle, 1969; Deutsch, 1969; and Crovetto, Fisher, and Bordreaux, 1968). This study has attempted to demonstrate the effects of self-concept enhancement program on the self-concepts of four-year-old preschool children and has underscored the possible need for self-concept enhancement programs as a crucial and permanent aspect of preschool experience for children.

Methodology

It was the goal of this study to demonstrate that developmental guidance activities which focus on self-concept enhancement can be presented effectively in an organized program to middle-class children. The self-concept enhancement program used for the experimental treatment was adopted by one of the investigators from several published developmental guidance programs (For example, Anderson, Lang, and Scott, 1970; Dinkmeyer, 1970; and Corini and Callas, 1971). The program was organized into 33 sessions covering an 11 week period. Beginning with introductory activities, the program proceeded to activities focused specifically on enhancement of the physical self, the intellectual self, the emotional self, and the social self.

Two instruments were used to assess self-concept. The Thomas Self-Concept Values Test (TSCVT) was administered individually by an experienced examiner to the population sample of four-year-old children. The Developmental Profile was completed by the teachers of the children in the population sample.

The TSCVT (Thomas, 1969) was designed for individual testing of ages three through nine years. Four different referents are used in response to each of 14 value scales. These referents are: (a) self-as-subject, (b) self-as-parent, (c) self-as-teacher, and (d) self-as-peer. The 14 self-value scales are described as value dimensions of social experience (1969, p. 13) and are: happiness, size, sociability, ability, sharing, male acceptance, fear of things, fear of people, strength, cleanliness, health, attractiveness, material, and independence. These 14 scales appeared to be related to the cultural demands of middle-class children and to the developmental tasks and problems which four to six-year-olds seem to experience. The TSCVT yielded the 14 value scores, the four self-concept referent scores, and an overall self-concept score.

The Developmental Profile (Bessell and Palomares, 1970) was also used to assess the effects of the self-concept enhancement program. This assessment differed from the TSCVT in that it was a direct observation in a selected situation by an observer, rather than a self report. The six specific dimensions of the scale are: awareness of self, self-confidence, interpersonal comprehension, sensitivity to others, effectiveness, and tolerance.

Thus, the TSCVT yielded 19 scores and the Developmental Profile yielded six, producing a total of 25 self-concept indices. The self-concept scores

for the experimental and control groups were analyzed separately to test the difference between the mean from pretests to posttests. The overall comparison of change between the experimental and control groups to test the greater increase in self-concept for the experimental group was also undertaken.

Research Sample

The population sample (N = 52) consisted of all four-year-old children enrolled at a preschool which met on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Although they could all be classified as middle-class, their ethnic backgrounds were diverse and appeared to represent a heterogeneous sample of four-year-olds. The control group originated with 22 children, four of whom were loss because of circumstances beyond the experimenter's control. The control subjects did not receive the self-concept enhancement program. The experimental group consisted of 35 subjects, one of whom moved away between pretesting and posttesting. The experimental group received the self-concept enhancement program on every school day for 11 weeks in sessions of 20 to 30 minutes. For the analyses, there were 18 subjects in the control group and 34 in the experimental group.

Analysis of the Data

Hypothesis 1

Were there significant increases in self-concept scores for the control group that did not receive the self-concept enhancement program?

A related *t*-test was used to test the significance of the differences between the means for pretest and posttest scores. Out of the 25 self-concept scales, there was a significant increase (at the .01 level) for

the control group on the awareness of self scale of the Developmental Profile (Table 1). Since 25 t-tests were conducted, it was not surprising to find a significant change on one of the scales. The investigators questioned whether the change could be attributed to maturity, some unisolated variables, or chance.

Hypothesis 2

Were there significant increases in self-concept scores for the experimental group that received the self-concept enhancement program?

Again, the related t-test was used and there were significant increases on 13 scores beyond the .01 level (Table 2).

Hypothesis 3

Were the increases greater for the experimental group as compared to the control group?

An analysis of the gain scores for both groups was performed and the results are tabulated in Table 3. There was significantly more increase on four variables for the experimental group, namely, Sociability, Material, Self-as-Subject Concept, and Total Self-Concept of the TSCVT. No differences were recorded on the Developmental Profile. One variable, Cleanliness, came out in favor of the control. No logical explanation can be given for this result at the present time.

TABLE 1

SELF-CONCEPT CHANGE FOR CONTROL GROUP (N = 18)

Self-Concept Scales: Thomas Self-Concept Values Test	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	*t* Value
Happiness	2.56	3.50	-1.86
Size	0.56	0.22	0.57
Sociability	2.44	1.94	0.84
Ability	-0.61	0.00	-0.83
Sharing	0.11	1.17	-1.59
Male Acceptance	1.06	1.39	-0.47
Fear of Things	1.22	2.33	-1.72
Fear of People	1.89	2.89	-2.10
Strength	0.61	1.56	-1.15
Cleanliness	2.50	3.33	-1.59
Health	1.67	2.56	-1.07
Attractiveness	3.06	3.56	-1.45
Material	-2.56	-3.22	1.68
Independence	1.33	1.94	-1.14
Self-as-Subject Concept	4.83	6.17	-1.71
Self-as-Mother Concept	3.89	6.11	-2.25
Self-as-Teacher Concept	3.89	5.44	-1.61
Self-as-Peer Concept	3.22	5.83	-1.93
Total Self-Concept	15.83	23.00	-2.28

Self-Concept Scales: Developmental Profile	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	*t* Value
Awareness of Self	4.83	5.44	-3.05*
Self Confidence	5.50	6.06	-1.43
Interpersonal Comprehension	4.89	5.33	-1.51
Sensitivity to Others	4.72	5.22	-1.37
Effectiveness	4.61	4.89	-0.96
Tolerance	4.56	4.72	-0.51

*Significant at the .01 level

TABLE 2

SELF-CONCEPT CHANGE FOR EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (N = 34)

Self-Concept Scales: Thomas Self-Concept Values Test	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	t Value
Happiness	1.71	3.03	-2.95**
Size	1.03	0.65	0.95
Sociability	1.94	3.12	-3.47**
Ability	-0.21	0.41	-1.21
Sharing	0.53	2.56	-3.64**
Male Acceptance	1.08	1.41	-0.49
Fear of Things	0.79	3.05	-5.61***
Fear of People	1.50	3.24	-3.97***
Strength	0.85	1.47	-1.05
Cleanliness	3.24	3.35	-0.46
Health	1.29	2.21	-1.84
Attractiveness	2.79	3.21	-1.27
Material	-2.27	-1.47	-1.76
Independence	1.06	2.47	-2.65*
Self-as-Subject Concept	3.32	7.18	-4.86***
Self-as-Mother Concept	3.35	7.24	-3.98***
Self-as-Teacher Concept	4.68	7.09	-3.45**
Self-as-Peer Concept	3.88	6.91	-4.14***
Total Self-Concept	15.24	28.41	-5.25***

Self-Concept Scales: Developmental Profile	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	t Value
Awareness of Self	4.41	5.24	-3.72***
Self Confidence	4.29	5.06	-4.15***
Interpersonal Comprehension	4.65	5.09	-1.69
Sensitivity to Others	4.38	5.24	-2.80**
Effectiveness	5.03	5.35	-1.13
Tolerance	4.97	5.18	-0.72

*Significant at the .05 level
**Significant at the .01 level
***Significant at the .001 level

TABLE 3

SELF CONCEPT GAIN FOR EXPERIMENTAL (N = 34)

AND CONTROL GROUP (N = 18)

Self-Concept Scales: Thomas Self-Concept Values Test	Control Gain	Experimental Gain	t Value
Happiness	.94	1.32	.80
Size	- .23	- .38	- .38
Sociability	- .50	1.18	4.94***
Ability	.61	.62	.02
Sharing	1.06	2.03	1.73
Male Acceptance	.33	.33	0.0
Fear of Things	1.11	2.26	2.87
Fear of People	1.00	1.74	1.68
Strength	.95	.62	-1.05
Cleanliness	.83	.09	-3.70***
Health	.89	.92	.06
Attractiveness	.50	.42	- .24
Material	- .66	.80	3.24**
Independence	.61	1.41	1.51
Self-as-Subject Concept	1.34	3.86	3.22**
Self-as-Mother Concept	2.22	3.89	1.71
Self-as-Teacher Concept	1.55	2.41	1.23
Self-as-Peer Concept	2.51	3.03	.71
Total Self-Concept	7.17	13.17	2.39*

Self-Concept Scales Developmental Profile	Control Gain	Experimental Gain	t Value
Awareness of Self	.61	.83	1.00
Self Confidence	.56	.77	1.11
Interpersonal Comprehension	.44	.44	0.0
Sensitivity to Others	.50	.86	1.16
Effectiveness	.38	.32	- .21
Tolerance	.16	.21	.17

*Significant at the .05 level
**Significant at the .01 level
***Significant at the .001 level

Conclusions

The experimental group did, in fact, show more significant changes in self-concept scores than the control group, confirming hypothesis three. Since a control group was used to check intervening variables, the changes made in the experimental group could be attributed to the self-concept enhancement program. Furthermore, a parallel was observed between the significant self-concept scale changes in the experimental group and certain specific self-concept enhancement activities. The self-concept enhancement activities were focused on emotional development problems such as self-satisfaction, self-confidence, relinquishment of irrational fears, and improvement of social interactions (through sharing, etc.) By consulting Table 2, differences can be seen in self-concept scale changes for the experimental group. The experimental group showed very significant increases on the self-concept factor scales of happiness, sociability, sharing, fear of things (less fear), fear of people (less fear), independence, awareness of self, self-confidence, and sensitivity to others. These changes were reflected not only in the children's self reports (TSCVT), but also in their teachers' ratings (Developmental Profile); and furthermore, these scale changes showed a clear reflection of the activities presented to the children through the self-concept enhancement program. In contrast, the control group showed only one significant increase on a self-concept factor scale (Table 1) and this was in terms of awareness of self (a teacher rating). From the significant differences in self-concept score changes for the experimental and control groups (Table 3), the investigators concluded the existence of the program's

salient effects on increased self-concepts in four-year-old children.

During the course of the treatment period, the investigator subjectively noted a growing openness on the part of the children. Given the medium for expression (that is, the various self-concept enhancement activities) the children became more free and deep in their expression of feelings and thus, could more effectively communicate with others. At the same time, through the use of the discussion rules, their listening skills were improved. They seemed more aware of how other children perceived them and others. Lastly, they appeared to acquire an understanding of cause and effect relationships; that is, the relationship between the behavior of one person and the resultant feelings of another person. The teachers of the children remarked on how the children would often settle disputes with others by verbalizing their feelings, rather than by resorting to hitting or crying. At the conclusion of the program it was obvious to the investigator that the children could better cope with frustration. Thus, the investigators concluded that the goals and purposes of the self-concept enhancement program had been achieved by the experimental group.

At the conclusion of the study program the preschool administrator requested that the investigator meet with the control group twice a week for the remainder of the year and provide them with the same self-concept enhancement program that had been presented to the experimental group. As the administrator was a teacher of children from both the experimental and control groups she was in a position to note differences in their development. Her request was interpreted by the investigator as further subjective evidence of the profound effects of a self-concept enhancement program at the preschool level.

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